

Feeling let down by God

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[0 : 00] When last did you feel let down by God? Let's be honest, we all have felt that at one time or another, whether we admit it or not. We've expected God to come through for us.

We've prayed to Him about a particular situation we're going through. We prayed and prayed and waited and waited and nothing. He seems just not to have been there at all.

Been through that situation? Felt that? Do you feel that God has let you down? Well, if so, if you felt that, I want you to know that you're not alone.

Because today we read about the sisters Mary and Martha who have just lost their brother Lazarus. To a serious illness and they feel let down. They feel disappointed. They feel let down by Jesus who is the friend of their family.

And not just any friend. He is the friend who has become famous at this point for healing diseases. From taking people from the point of death.

[1 : 07] From giving a man who had never seen sight again. He had this amazing power and he was their friend. And yet when they needed him the most, he wasn't there.

When they needed him to come and help Lazarus in his dying days. He wasn't there at all. And you can imagine the disappointment they felt.

You can put yourself in their position. It's interesting in this passage how they deal with that disappointment in different ways. Notice from verse 20. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming. She went out to meet him but Mary stayed at home.

Lord, Martha said to Jesus. If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

Martha answered, I know you will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Okay, so we've got to give Martha her credit here. She's a woman of faith. She's disappointed but still she clings to her faith.

[2 : 05] The Jewish belief in the resurrection that she had. Mary on the other hand, not so much. She deliberately stays away. She doesn't want to see Jesus at first. And then when she does later, we have this quite tense scene in verse 32.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Simply, in other words, where were you, Jesus?

We needed you and you didn't come. Well, it's not unlikely, as I said, that you felt that at some point in your life. Where were you, God? I needed you and you weren't there.

Well, it's in this story that we find the answer to that question. When God's children ask, where were you, God? That's what this chapter, I think, is here to answer.

We find the reason why God sometimes seems to disappoint us in our lives and in the tough situations we're going through. And we discover that the reason in a word is perspective.

[3 : 07] Perspective. The reason is because God views our lives and what goes on in our lives from a very different perspective than we do.

Take death, for example, which is the subject of today's passage. You see, for us, death is the greatest enemy. Death is the greatest threat.

It hangs over our lives like a shadow every day. It's the one thing we'll do everything to avoid. For these sisters, the death of Lazarus was the worst thing that could happen in their lives.

And yet notice that's not the way Jesus viewed death in this passage. He had a very different perspective to death. Let's look at what he says from verse 11. After he had said this, he went on to tell them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up.

His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better. Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought that he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead.
[4 : 12] And for your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Okay, so Jesus knew that Lazarus had died.

He had supernatural knowledge. He is the son of God. He can know these things. And yet even though he knew Lazarus had died, he wasn't fazed. He wasn't bothered by it. I mean, it seems quite unfeeling.

But the real reason is because he didn't view death the same way we do. He didn't see it as the worst thing that could happen. And he knew that there are more important things than trying to avoid it.

Even right at the start, he says, verse 4, if you have a look up there, he says, the sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, so that God's son may be glorified through it.

So in other words, he's saying, don't worry about Lazarus dying. Don't stress. That's not going to be the end result, obviously. And besides, his temporary death will actually be for a much greater good, for the glory of God's son.

[5 : 20] And so you see, Jesus had a very different perspective on this whole situation than Mary and Martha did. What seemed like him letting them down was actually not that at all.

It was a different perspective. But it's the same for us, you see, in our lives. The perspective we have on any given situation, especially the tough parts of our lives, is typically not the perspective that God has on those situations.

And what seems like God letting us down is really not that at all. And that's the first thing we need to understand from this story, just the importance of learning to see things from God's perspective, not our own.

I don't know how good your South African history is, but it's interesting to see the different names that the Cape was given by the early explorers. Bartholomew Dyers, first coming here, arriving probably in a howling Southeaster, he named this place the Cape of Storms.

And sad for him, he actually perished in one of the Cape's storms. But later on, came Vasco da Gama. And he had a very different name for this place. Anyone know what it is?

[6 : 32] The Cape of Good Hope. Now, why the difference? Well, because Vasco da Gama had a very different perspective on this place than Dyers. Dyers just saw this place as a horrible place of storms.

Vasco da Gama, on the other hand, saw this place as the way to the riches of the Far East. A place of hope. A place of promise. While Dyers just saw it as a problem to avoid.

Now, the story in John 11 is about seeing the problems of life, especially death, from a bigger perspective. From a da Gama perspective, not a Dyers perspective.

And that's what faith actually is. That's what faith means when the Bible talks about faith. Now, the word faith is often misunderstood in our world. Faith is not just blind belief in some religious doctrine, in some abstract body of teaching.

No, faith is seeing things in God's perspective. Simply put. Seeing our life and our situations and our trials from God's point of view rather than our own.

[7 : 36] That's what faith is. To continue the analogy, it's like being a passenger on da Gama's ship. Feeling the storm. Not knowing why you're going through it.

But then you go to the captain and you see the charts. And you see the bigger picture. And you get it. And you trust that the captain knows what he's doing. Even in the storm. That's faith.

It's living in light of the bigger picture. And God has given us the charts of life in his word, the Bible. To give us faith. To give us his perspective.

You know, reading the Bible on a regular basis as a habit, as a discipline. Is not just to get a little boost to carry us through the day. It's to give us a whole new perspective on life and eternity.

That's the importance of it. That's why we should be doing it. The more we read the Bible. And the more we learn about the teachings of the Bible through things like catechisms and Bible studies.

[8 : 31] The more we do that and make that a discipline in our lives. The more we can start to see our life and our situations from God's perspective. And not our own. And so, that said, what is the perspective that Jesus wants us to have in John 11?

The perspective on death that he wants us to have. What is the bigger picture that this miracle is meant to teach us this morning? Because as you know, hopefully it's not a spoiler alert, Jesus

raised Lazarus from the dead.

After being dead for four days, his corpse is already rotting. An amazing, miraculous display of power. Jesus proved what John said at the beginning of the gospel.

That in him is life. Jesus is the source of life. That's where life comes from. And he can give life back to a man who's been dead. And his corpse is rotting in the ground. And he showed us this. In this amazing miracle. Which you can't dispute. It's historical accuracy. Even the enemies of Jesus we see at the end of the chapter. Couldn't deny.

[9 : 38] This amazing act of power. But it all happens to teach us something about ourselves, our lives, and our death. What is it here to teach us?

Well, we see it in verse 25. It's really the key verse 25 and 26 in this passage. If you're going to have a memory verse for today, this would be it.

And this is what Jesus wants us to realize from this miracle. It's what he wants Martha to realize. He says this. Verse 25. I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die.

And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? And that right there is the Christian perspective on death.

That when a person comes to Jesus, they tap into the source of life. Which Jesus proved that he is. He is the source of life. In the creation in eternity past.

[10 : 35] Jesus, we're told in John 1, was the source of all life. And that source of all life in creation came to be a man on this earth. And he is able then to give life back to whoever he wants.

He is the source of that life. And when you tap into that. When you come to that person Jesus. Then you can never really die.

You can never die. You never run out of life. That's what he's saying. Now, we're in a water crisis in the Cape. Now, if you've studied the water cycle.

Which I hope you did at school. You'll know that all water comes from the sea. Originally. So, it gets evaporated. Sun shines on the sea. It gets evaporated. It goes into clouds. The clouds come over the land. They rain on our catchment areas.

And the dams hopefully get full. Which they're not at the moment. But that's where the water comes from. That's the source of all our water that we drink. From the sea. And it's because of that.

[11 : 34] That most modern ships will never run out of water. Most modern ships. Have desalination systems on board. And they're in the water. So, whenever they want water.

They just get more. And they're able to make it drinkable. They have direct access to the source of all the water. They don't need dams. They don't need catchment areas and rain. Because they've got it right there.

They never run out. Well, that's what Jesus says about those who live in him. If Jesus is the environment in which you live. When it comes to life itself. He is the source of life.

And if you're in that source of life. If you're tapped into him. You will never run out of it. That's what he's saying here. Look at what he says again. Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Never die. I mean, that's a crazy thing to say. I mean, come on Jesus. I know people who have believed in you and died. What do you mean? A believer will never die.

[12 : 33] Is he lying? Did he get it wrong? Or is it a matter of perspective? It is. It's a different perspective on life and death.

You see, when a person comes to faith in Jesus. We learned in John chapter 3 last year. They begin a new life. They are, what Jesus says, born again.

John 3 verse 3. And that is something that we learned doesn't happen in some distant future that you're born again. It happens here, now, in this life when you come to Jesus in faith. It's a new life that starts now.

A life governed by God's spirit with new desires, new priorities, and new joys. If you like, the spirit is the desalination system that gives us access to this new life.

And a Christian's new life runs in parallel with their old life. So a Christian is living two lives. Until their old life dies in physical death.

[13 : 34] But then their new life continues. And doesn't end. And so in a very real sense, a Christian will never die. At worst, it's basically a changing of lanes into your new life.

But do you see what Jesus means? Do you see his perspective here? When he's talking about God's people, those who are living those two lives, even when your old life dies, your new life

doesn't, you never die.

That is a Christian perspective on death. And it's a perspective that if you have in your life, changes everything. It's a perspective which causes Christians in Iraq and other persecuted countries to not fear what man can do to them.

It's a perspective that causes Paul to say to the Philippians, to live is Christ, but to die is gain. Can you say that? To die is gain. It's a perspective that when we have, it changes what we live for and the sacrifices we're willing to make in this life.

When we come to realize that we never die. It changes everything. That's why Jesus said to Martha, do you believe this? It's so important that you need to get this, that a Christian never dies. [14:47] It'll change everything for you. And he raised Lazarus to make that point. That for a believer in him, death is really nothing to worry about.

And that's what this miracle is here in the Bible to teach us. But now all that said, even though we can have a different perspective on death, we still feel it, don't we?

We still feel the pain of it. Especially when someone we know, a loved one, dies. For many of us, that is worse than ourselves dying. And so no matter what perspective we have on it, we still feel it. We still grieve. We still hurt. It's unavoidable. And we see that in this passage as well. Because even Jesus felt grief, didn't he? Shortest verse in the Bible.

Jesus wept. Even though he knew it was going to happen, he felt the grief of the people he loved. He felt the sadness that death causes. He wasn't immune to grief.

[15:45] Jesus wasn't immune to grief. And so neither will you or I be. We will feel pain and grief and sadness in this life. It's unavoidable. And so yes, this passage teaches us about the bigger perspective that we should have as Christians.

But what does it have to say to us when we're in the middle of that grief, when we're really feeling it? Besides, you know, just remember the bigger picture. What does it have to say to us? Well, I think it has a lot to say to us.

And it says it to us in the small details of the story that you probably didn't pick up on first reading. And the Bible is incredible in that. If you've read the Bible, if you've spent time in the Bible, you'll see that as you read it, there are every word and every phrase inspired by God to be there has something to say to us.

It's why we should read the Bible slowly and meditate on it, not just read it quickly to get it done. Meditate on it. Chew over it. In fact, in our evening service tonight, which I invite you all to, because that'll give you a chance to get deeper into the word.

We're going to learn about what it means to meditate on scripture. So if you want to know that, come along. Listen to God's word. We're going to watch some helpful videos, including one on what it means to how to meditate on scripture.

[17:01] So make that your new discipline. Sunday evening, 6 o'clock to 7. And there's free coffee. And it's good. Anyway, there's a lot of details in the word. And every word is there for a reason.

So let's look briefly now, before I finish, at three details in this story and what they teach us about grief and suffering in our lives. Firstly, verse 5 and 6.

Let's read that together. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Now some Bibles, the old NIV, one of them, might read yet at the beginning of verse 6.

But a more accurate translation in the newer NIV is the word so. And I want to stop there. I don't want you to think that your Bible is unreliable. Translation is never an exact science.

The original text is in Greek. And we're constantly learning about translation. And the scholars that translate the Bible for us, they're constantly getting more and more into the original languages.

[18:04] Of course, none of those differences or updates change the main meaning of the Bible. That is very clear. God has made it clear. But there are these small words which are important to translate properly.

And that's why you pay me to be a pastor so I can spend the week looking at these words in the Greek and making sure that you're getting the right thing. So the more accurate translation, beginning of verse 6, is so.

But what does it matter? It's just a little two-letter word. Well, it's because a little word can make a big difference. And this little word has a shocking implication. Let's read it again. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Do you see it? It's saying that it's because Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus that he didn't come to heal him.

But he waited for him to die because he loved him that much. It doesn't make any sense. But when we understand that it was through this miracle that Mary and Martha and Lazarus came to true faith in Jesus because they saw who he was.

[19 : 10] And faith is what taps them into life. Then we see why it was necessary for Lazarus to die. Jesus allowed them to go through this time of suffering for their good.

For the sake of their faith in him. Which gives them real life. But it's not just them. He does the same for you and me. He does the same for all of his people.

He doesn't want us to suffer. He doesn't like it. He grieves with us when we suffer. But he loves us enough that he prioritizes our faith over our comfort.

And he prioritizes our eternal life over our temporary life now. That's how much he loves us. And so he allows suffering in our lives insofar as it will build our faith and the faith of others which is vital for eternal life.

And so Christians, those who are in Christ, those who call God their father because they have come to him in a personal relationship because their sins have been dealt with on the cross.

[20 : 13] Christians suffer not because God doesn't love us but because he does. Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus come out.

Not just come out. And that would have sufficed. Why use his name? Well, you know, maybe it's to show us his personal relationship with the man that he used his name.

But maybe it was to single him out. To show us that this is not the final resurrection. This is an exception.

This is a particular one man singled out for a particular purpose. One commentator put it like this. The authority of Jesus is so great that had he not specified Lazarus, all the tombs would have given up their dead to resurrection life.

And it's true. I mean, he was the source of life. He had infinite power. And it was probably a place with many tombs where Lazarus was buried. And so Jesus could have raised them all just by saying, come out.

[21 : 19] But he didn't. He raised only Lazarus. And he didn't even raise him to eternal life. Then Lazarus died again. So why did he do it? Why did he raise this one man just to a little bit more life on earth?

Well, we've learned it already, haven't we? He did it to give people faith in him. He didn't do this miracle just to give Lazarus more life in this world. He did this miracle to give Lazarus and Mary and Martha and his disciples and us life in the world to come.

That's why he did this. And that's why he inspired it to be written and recorded for us today in 2018. See, this teaches us that Jesus came into our world not to solve our temporary problems, but to solve our eternal problem.

Jesus didn't come to improve this life a little bit, like so many people look to him to do. No. He came to give us new life, eternal life through faith. Life that never ends.

And so I've got two questions for you this morning. Firstly, most importantly, do you have that faith that gives life? Are you tapped into the source of life yet? Because if you aren't, why not?

[22 : 33] You're going to die. Sorry to spoil your Sunday, but it's going to happen. So you need to prepare for it. And Jesus has given you the ultimate way to prepare for it because he is the one who gives life.

So come to Christ. Listen to him. Put your faith in him. If you haven't done that yet, it's urgent. And I urge you to do it. But if you have done that and you follow Jesus in your life, then I want to ask you, what are you looking for him to give you as you follow him daily?

Are you wanting him to improve this temporary life on earth? Remember, we're living two lives. Our temporary life and our eternal new life in Christ.

Are you looking at Jesus mainly to improve this life that's going to end anyway? Maybe to make it more comfortable? To help you to live it a little bit more? Or are you looking to him to help you live this life?

To help you to change lanes before you die and start living your eternal life? Is that what you're looking to Jesus to do and following him for in your life? Or are you just looking to him to give you a

little boost to live this life that's passing away?

[23 : 38] Ask yourself that. Because if you're just looking to Jesus to improve this life, then you will be disappointed in him. But if you're looking to him to help you to live this life that never ends, then you will never be disappointed in him.

Because that is what he came to earth to do. And we are called to start living this new life now. Throughout the New Testament, the letters that the apostles write, they're all teaching us how to live this new life.

How to turn away from the old life. Read them. Because they're there for you to do that. In how we interact with others daily. In how we see our lives.

In what we live for. We are called to be new creatures in Christ. And so are you planning this coming week to live your new life in Christ? Or just to carry on living your old life that's passing away?

Because Jesus didn't come to help you live your old life. He came to help you live your new life. Final detail I want us to notice comes later in the aftermath of this miracle.

[24 : 46] The Pharisees, the enemies of Jesus, realize that after this miracle, unless they do something, they are finished. Jesus is going to get such a following that it will threaten their power.

Maybe even cause a civil war. And so the chief priests agree that they should kill him. Justifying it like this. The high priest, Caiaphas, evil man, says, verse 50.

It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. Let's just off Jesus. Let's just send our assassins before this becomes a real problem.

That's what he meant. Except he spoke better than he knew. Because the next verse says, He did not say this on his own.

But as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation. And not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one.

[25 : 46] So even though this priest was an evil man with evil motives, God allowed him to make a prophecy. God often uses evil people to carry out his will.

And he allowed this high priest to make a prophecy that Jesus would die on behalf of others so that they don't perish. Sounds a lot like John 3.16, doesn't it?

God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish. Not die. Caiaphas, without knowing, prophesied that Jesus was going to come and stop people from dying.

Which he did when he died on the cross to save us from our sins. And to save us from the punishment and the eternal death that results from our sins. And that's really what this whole story is about.

In summary, Jesus coming to die to give life. Did you notice at the beginning his disciples didn't want him to go near Jerusalem? It was too dangerous. They tried to keep him back.

[26 : 44] Because Lazarus and Mary and Martha lived right near Jerusalem. But he went anyway. He made the decision to go knowing what would come. Knowing that he would die.

And he did it so that he could give his friend life. This is a story about Jesus making the choice to die. To give life to his friend.

But not just to his friend. To you and to me. To take away your sins on the cross. To die your death so you can start living a new life that will never end.

Now can you really be disappointed in a God who did that for you? Next time you feel let down by God. Remember this story. That even if he allows his people to go through storms.

He loves them far more than they know. And if you are one of those people. He is right there with you. In those storms. Feeling it with you. Grieving with you as you go through grief.

[27 : 46] Suffering with us. Which he proved ultimately when he took your worst suffering. On the cross. And he took your death on your behalf. And all your punishment for your sins.

That you confessed earlier. Jesus took those. For you. To give you eternal life. And that is a God. Who we can rely on.

No matter what storms he takes us through. In the coming week. In the coming year. And for the rest of our lives. And so let's pray in response to what we've heard. Lord Jesus we thank you that you have come.

The source of life. And you've come into our dying world. To give us new life. Help us Lord. To live the new lives that you call us to. I pray for anybody here this morning. Who has not yet put their faith.

In you. Lord help them. To come. To believe. To follow you. And to start their new lives. To be born again. And for those who have Lord.

[28 : 42] I pray that you would help us. In the weeks. And the months to come. To look to you. To pray to you. To discipline our lives. To follow you. So that we can live our new lives.

Help us not to look to you. To improve our old lives. But to live our new lives. And give us great joy and comfort. As we do that. Knowing.

Where we're headed. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.